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RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
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NSC FOR WOOD
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SUBJECT: DOSTUM'S VOTER REGISTRATION APPEAL

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Junbesh party founder General Abdul Rashid Dostum has appealed to all Afghans to register to vote in the 2009 elections. In particular, he calls upon mullahs to encourage women to vote and asks businessmen to provide transportation to voter registration centers for people living in remote areas. Dostum's message is unlikely to motivate non-Junbesh supporters to register. For Dostum, it is an attempt at improving his own battered image in the eyes of the Junbesh faithful as the start of the campaign season draws near. Still unknown is to whom he will throw his support next year, as both president Karzai and the United Front have courted him for his influence among Uzbek voters. END SUMMARY.

Dostum Endorses Voter Registration

12. (SBU) In a flyer distributed widely across the northern provinces and in news reports aired by Aina TV (owned in part by Dostum), Dostum calls upon all Afghans to do their patriotic duty by registering to vote. He says that just as Junbesh was the first party to participate in the Demobilization, Disarmament, and Reintegration process (DDR), so too does Junbesh want to lead by example by supporting the voter registration process. He urges women, students, elders, his own party faithful and anyone who has lost their voter registration card or is turning 18 years of age to register for next year's elections. He also exhorts mullahs and businessmen to do their share: mullahs, by encouraging women to vote and businessmen, by providing transportation to voter registration centers to people in remote areas. At least one ethnic Uzbek businessman and Junbesh supporter - Lower House MP Mohammad Yousuf Ghazanfar (Balkh, Uzbek)- has agreed to provide transportation to voter registration centers for people in Uzbek-dominant districts of Balkh province.

13. (SBU) On November 16, the Junbesh women's wing in Jowzjan province hosted a rally at the Junbesh palace, where Dostum's message was read aloud to 300 female supporters. Similar meetings have been held in other districts of both Jowzjan and Faryab provinces. Junbesh is also planning to hold a women's voter registration rally in Balkh province.

Dostum's Likely Motivation

14. (SBU) With various scandals associated with his behavior likely ruling out a return to a high-ranking government post, Dostum knows his continued influence in Afghan politics is tied to the number of

Uzbek votes he can turn out. Dostum's message is unlikely to stir anyone to register to vote who isn't already a Junbesh supporter. But at least on paper, the message is consistent with Junbesh's desire to broaden its appeal beyond its ethnic Uzbek and Turkmen base. And perhaps of greatest importance to Dostum, it reinforces his image as the heart and soul of Junbesh in the eyes of the party faithful as the campaign season draws near.

WOOD